

LANGUAGE AND RELIGION

BY

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Reprinted from Transactions of the Canadian Institute.

VOL. VI., 1899.

TORONTO:
MURRAY PRINTING COMPANY, GLOBE BUILDING.
1899.

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Language is the handmaid of religion. As the outward expression of religion is dependent upon language, we may by the study of the words and forms of expression obtain some conception of the religious ideas and ceremonies of a tribe or nation. As ancient religion was dependent for its expression on language, we can best understand it by understanding the ancient tongue, and without this knowledge we are compelled to accept the interpretations of scholars who are conversant with the form of speech. Archaeology comes to our aid in understanding ancient religious beliefs and practices, but the chief place must be given to language. As there are various dialects of language, so there are dialects of religion of numerous kinds, whereby the learned and ignorant, the clergy and laity, men, women and children express their religious thoughts and feelings. As language changes from the period of childhood to that of manhood, so does religion. So closely are they related that language is influenced by religion, and deeply imbedded in the words spoken are the thoughts and forms of religion practised by the priests and people. Religion lies at the foundation of national unity and when a tribe or nation becomes definite, the language becomes definite, and we are able to see the relationship existing between language and religion. During the childhood of the human race the various tribes of men had no doubt religious rites as an expression of their thoughts about God and his relationship to his creatures, and some form of verbal communication had been used for handing down from father to son the creed which became a tie to bind them together. The study of language has enabled us to trace the objects of worship to their root-forms, thus revealing the meaning and thought that lay at the root of the worship, and the identity of the gods of different nations, though having apparently different names, has been proved by resolving them into the same root-word. Language expresses the inner life of a people, and by its help we may obtain with considerable accuracy a knowledge of their modes of life and thought, and religious beliefs and forms of worship.

The seal of truth has been impressed upon language, and men are uttering deeper things than they know, and sometimes asserting great principles against themselves. Language has influenced opinions and beliefs and religion has influenced language. The stream of language has revealed in words, and roots of words, the arts, habits, life and religion of the prehistoric Aryan race.

As some ethnologists assert that there are no atheistic peoples, may we not also say that there are no atheistic languages? In the languages of numerous tribes there exist words for spirit, sin, sacrifice and God, the latter word not having the same meaning in all. Among the Cree Indians the word used for God is *Kitcemûnlto* = Big Spirit, and among the Blackfeet *Omûqkatos* = The Great Sun, and *Apîstotokî* = the Creator. *Kinon* = our Father as a term for God is the apparent result of missionary teaching. Missionaries are apt to believe that the languages are atheistic, because they do not find a word for God, having the same definite meaning as it conveys to the Christian mind and heart, just as they might say that the tribes have no religion because it is different from the Christian religion. But there are tribes such as are found in Australia which have no word for tree, fish or bird, yet they are not ignorant of these things. Worship is given by some of our Canadian Indians to the sun, and there are gods of greater and lesser degree. The languages reveal the names of these several deities, one of which seems to occupy the chief place, and though the chief deity differs from the supreme being of the Jews and Christians, we may call these people and languages theistic in the sense of having a chief deity. As there are no tribes without some kind of religion, so there are no agnostic languages. The religious ideas may be crude and the system very imperfect, yet there is some form of religion of whose meaning we learn by a study of the native tongues.

The polytheistic languages reveal a worship of single spirits as sun, storms and lightning, mountains and rivers; and ancestral spirits, who retain some cognizance of human affairs and exercise power for good or evil over men and things, are also worshipped. Max Müller assures us that the Semitic races had a number of names for Deity, as shown in the Phœnicians and Carthaginians, and in the monotheistic creeds of Jews, Mohammedans and Christians. The worship of the Semitic nations was a worship of God in history, as God affecting the destinies of individuals, races and nations. The names of Semitic deities expressed moral qualities generally, as the Strong, the Exalted, the Lord, the King, and seldom grew into divine personalities, definite in their outward appearance. Many ancient Semitic gods had a tendency to flow

together and the transition to the worship of one god was easy. When we study the American Indian languages we find that the different stocks give different religious beliefs. The principal divinity among the Algonkin tribes is known under various names, as *Glooscap* among the Penobscots and Micmacs, *Nanabush* and *Manabosho* among the Delawares and Ojibwas, and *Napio* among the Blackfeet. The idea of a Supreme Being among these tribes is somewhat indefinite, whereby the term theistic as applied to them must be qualified as already mentioned. The definite deity is a mythical personage, good and bad. The grave Huron-Iroquois people have a different principal divinity, known as *Taronhiawagon*, the Holder of the Heavens, or *Raweniyō*, our Great Master, "a deity nobler in character and attributes than any of the Aryan divinities." Horatio Hale has shown by a study of the Siouan languages that the intensely religious Dakotas have a remarkable set of deities, the *Oonktayhe* or gods of vital energy, the *Takooshkanshkan* or moving god, who is "too subtle to be perceived by the senses," who "is everywhere present," who "exerts a controlling influence over instinct, intellect and passion," and the *Hayoka* or anti-natural god, with whom all things work by the rule of contrary, to whom joy seems grief, and misery brings joy, who shivers in summer and swelters in winter, to whom good is evil and evil good. The medicine men who are the physicians and priests of the native tribes of Canada, the healers of diseases and spiritual advisers and intercessors, have a sacred dialect of speech, epithets raised from material meaning to a spiritual significance, words expressing religious ideas, and a style of phraseology peculiar to themselves. In the sacred dialect there is revealed a worship of God in nature, symbolical expressions and names of deities hidden behind the veil of nature. Beside their worship of the Great Sun, there exists an earth-worship, the Earth being called *Our Mother*. As the Chinese say that heaven and earth are the father and mother of all things, and the Greek Demeter (Ceres), which is of distinctly Aryan origin, being none other than Gēmēter, *mother-earth*, so the Blackfeet associating the idea of masculine godhead with the sun, place the fruitful, all-nourishing earth, as a goddess. The Sun is addressed as *Kinon* our father, and the earth as *Kiksistonon*, our mother.

The faculty of speech is a mysterious thing belonging to man as a supernatural being. We may assume that primitive man began his earthly career with vocal organs and the power of expression. A theory has been propounded that men or rather the precursors of men were at first incapable of speech, and that they acquired this capacity at different

places. Professor Hovelacque, the distinguished representative of linguistic science in France, after describing the impassable gulf which separates the Semitic and Indo-European languages, adds that the case of these languages is the case of a considerable number of linguistic systems and then says: "The consequence of this fact is important. If, as we have shown, the faculty of articulate speech is the proper and sole characteristic of man, and if the different linguistic systems which we know are irreducible, they must have come into existence separately, in regions entirely distinct. It follows that the precursor of man, the first to acquire the faculty of articulate language, has gained this faculty in different places at the same time, and has thus given birth to many human races originally distinct." The divisions of race into which the speechless descendants of these precursors of primitive man had separated before they acquired the faculty of language are laid down by Dr. Frederick Müller. The theory of a speechless race of human precursors or of human beings like ourselves without the faculty of speech raises difficulties greater than those which it is intended to remove. So far as we have been able to learn, primitive man began life with a voice. His vocal organs may not have been very flexible, but we may assume that they were sufficient to enable him to articulate words expressing his needs. Oral utterance was the form of expression used by primitive man, based upon his physical structure, intellectual endowments and social instincts. If he had been without a voice some other method of expression would have been found as in the case of deaf-mutes, sufficiently illustrated in the persons of Laura Bridgman and Helen Keller. There was a time when man was destitute of language, but possessed the faculty of speech, and were man again to be so situated that he had no language, he would recreate language, society and arts, and develop religion.

Gesture-language was one of the forms of speech of early man, coexistent with spoken language. It is a very expressive method of communication between persons who speak the same language, aiding them in emphasizing and making clear their words and phrases, and is a useful form of speech for those who speak different languages. Primitive man would naturally and unconsciously use this as an aid to the simple language which he spoke. Drummond in his *Ascent of Man* suggested that this was the earliest form of speech, preceding spoken language, and sound-speech arose from a necessity of communication at a distance, the sound reaching further than the sign, and being independent of light. Again it is said that speech is the product of a social state already considerably advanced, and the sounds being at first simply utter-

ances accompanying gestures, finally became the signs of the gestures. Gesture-language is used extensively at the present time by the Canadian Indians and numerous tribes throughout the world. The excellent monograph on this subject by Garrick Mallory has revealed its significance and universal use. Its present use by our native tribes reveals the fact that gesture language will reach farther than spoken language. Having occasion to speak to a white man on the Blood Indian Reserve, I found that the distance between us was so great that I could not make him hear, though shouting loudly, and to add to the difficulty he was travelling from me at a rapid pace. There was an Indian standing close to me, and another beyond my friend, and coming toward him. My red companion with a few gestures secured the attention of the other Indian, and the two natives carried on a conversation in the sign-language, with the result that when the Indian met the white man and he delivered to him his message, my white friend returned to the place where I stood waiting for him. Sound-speech preceded gesture-speech and the latter remained as an aid to fuller and more emphatic expression. We can never know what the first sound-signs were like, but their choice and currency would depend on the success with which they conveyed the meaning intended. Some of these gestures may have served as effective germs of speech, but would finally give place to the highest form of speech, language in the form of symbols and abstract terms.

The distinctive human faculty is the power of speech and thought. Man is distinguished from the lower animals by the faculty of thinking by symbols. Every kind of animal possesses some sort of language which is expressive of animal sensations, and sense-impressions and reasonings. Possessing different sorts of minds, they are able to express their needs and feelings to their kind by vocal intonations, gestures, touch and perhaps smell. The study of the speech of monkeys has revealed the fact that they have three or four inflections of the same sound, each with a meaning of its own. They are able to speak in syllables, the word for food having five or six syllables. There is however a wide gulf between animal and human intelligence and language. Animals have not the human larynx, and the power of human thought; man can learn the language of some animals, and imitate others, but animals are unable to learn the speech of men.

There must have been something in man which caused him first to use his mouth to give expression to the thought of his heart. To say that this was natural in the sense that speech was of human origin, is to

deal with the beginning of things shrouded in impenetrable mystery in an easy way. If man alone of all animal creation possesses the godlike attitude, and a hand which distinguishes him as a superior being, may we not mark his vocal organs and the faculty of speech as not only characteristic of his superiority, but as the nearest of earthborn to his Maker? He carries about in his garment of flesh, intellectual and spiritual nature, evidences of his divine origin, and the faculty of speech is not the weakest argument that he is a son of God. His vocal organs, intellect and will enable him to learn any language. The faculty of speech is the work of God. As he made man capable of seeing and hearing, he gave to him the faculty of speaking. Each living being was created with its special organs of voice and utterance and these have been perpetuated with other specialties of its peculiar organization.

The social state of man required language as a means of communication, simple in structure for early man, and not a highly perfected language. Several theories have been propounded as to its origin as the imitation of sounds, the utterance of exclamations in moments of emotion resolved into elements of language, and the spontaneous expression of each distinct conception of the mind. Was language fully matured bestowed upon man in a miraculous manner, or was there given to him by God the power of perfecting language from simple elements? The analysis of languages reveals the fact that they pass through stages of development, that a linguistic system cannot be manufactured and that in general they can be resolved into roots in their earliest stages. There is no necessity for accepting language as an attribute of man, a ready-made gift of God, nor ascribing it to human origin. There lie as its foundation, roots, which form the secondary stage, succeeding the stage of naming objects, as they suggested something to the mind peculiar to themselves. These roots as meaningless words seem to have arisen from the first class of words and became useful for joining words together, or they may have existed in the human mind as phonetic types implanted by God himself. By the joining of meaningless words, and of the meaning and meaningless together in their various stages according to unwritten laws, by the intelligent will of man influenced by his environment, we arrive at language in its true grammatical form, and language becomes a human art. We find in it the results of human intelligence and will, with God creating reason in man and laws of language. The first man began the work of making language by naming each one of the animals among whom he lived. He did not possess a ready-made grammar and dictionary, and even the names were not given to him, but

there was bestowed upon him the power of naming, for he was more than a speaking machine, uttering words as a parrot. God treated him as an intelligent being, and endowed him with the faculty of language, and by His power aroused the faculty to act in accordance with the divine laws. The greatness of the task set before Adam in naming the animals may be seen in the fact that he had to give original names, whilst the method usually followed by colonists and settlers is to give secondary names, such as they select from their previous knowledge. The work of the first man as the primitive language-former was sufficient to tax his highest powers, and awaken and keep active his sense of association between the external world and articulate sounds. The Jesuit Larramendi makes Basque the common source of all languages, the Abbé d'Iharce de Bidassouet says that Escuara was the language in which the Eternal Father conversed with the first of the Jews, an eminent Celtic scholar suggests that Celtic was the primitive tongue, whilst others have shown the affinity of the Celtic with Hebrew, making the former the older language, and some of the American Indian tribes speak of their language as the perfect language. The first language, however, is unknown to us, and will very likely remain a mystery.

The origin of all languages from a complete and perfect primeval language having a fully developed grammar and dictionary as the gift of God, accords with the idea that language is too great an achievement for the human mind, but there is no necessity for assuming the existence of such a primitive tongue, man being endowed with the faculty of speech and a creative faculty of language-making from germs or roots, so that in accordance with the laws of language, he could develop a flexible form of speech, or by neglecting the laws, beget decay, or arrest a language in one of its stages. The origin of stocks of languages although a much disputed question seems to arise from the tribe or people which first spoke the mother tongue of each stock, having a common origin, and this tribe must have been isolated for a long time from other tribes sufficient to form a distinct grammar and vocabulary, and a peculiar mental and moral character. A language may become the mother of other languages, and these descendants preserve something in common by which philologists are able to trace them to the mother-tongue.

Languages are born, grow, decay and die like individuals, institutions, nations, races and religions. Just as the Hebrew has passed through three distinct phases, other tongues have developed and finally reached

a period of decay, and some have become altogether extinct. Modern German has extinguished Polabish and old Prussian. Latin has absorbed Oscan and Umbrian, the Galatians, Normans and Lombards lost their tongue, Cornish is no longer spoken, the Hochelagan and other native tongues of Canada have become extinct, and many of the American Indian forms of speech are doomed by the increasing power of English and the advance of a superior race. The beginnings of a tongue may arise from individuals in infancy possessed of a creative faculty, who are separated in age and intelligence from others, and compelled by association to hold communication with each other; words are formed only intelligible to themselves, which by modifications serve all the purposes of their life. Children have possessed this language-forming faculty and have made a language of their own, sufficient for their needs, which required only time, continued association, and such conditions as would preserve their speech from the dominant influence of a superior tongue, to give it a place in the world as a new language. The study of child-language reveals a faculty of sound-speech, vowel-sounds, expressions made up of consonants, meaningless in themselves, syllables which as nouns stand for several things, and by a change of accent become verbs, and finally an arrangement of the vocabulary into sentences. The growth of a tongue seems to depend upon individuals who unconsciously, yet by an act of the will, introduce syllables and various changes by their creative faculty, then by imitation and finally through habit. The origin and growth of languages by individuals seem to indicate a primitive stage of purity, strength and richness, which is not found in later stages, when the descendants of the first speakers are only imitators.

There are eleven stocks of languages and great divisions of the American race in Canada and Newfoundland as follows: Eskimo, Beothuk, Algonkin, Iroquois, Sioux, Athapaskan, Kootenay, Salish, Kwakiutl-Nootka, Tsimshian, and Haida. In British Columbia alone there are six linguistic stocks having twenty-nine dialects. The mental diversities of the native races, influenced by their environment, have contributed to the origin and growth of these languages. Political, social, literary and religious influences arrest languages in their growth, as seen in the formation of the three great families of speech, Turanian, Aryan, and Semitic, and in the Chinese, which is an example of a written language, arrested in an early period of its development, before the alphabet was reached. There are progressive and retrogressive movements evidencing growth and decay. There are evidences of corruption by loss of words, and replenishing from cognate dialects. Phonetic convenience works

many changes. The Normans found the French tongue a barbarous jargon, but they gave it dignity and permanence by fixing it in writing, and employing it in legislation, poetry, and romance. Sanskrit, Russian, Greek, Latin, Welsh, and English are acknowledged to be descendants of a single Aryan form of speech, spoken at some time by a single tribe or nation, yet the languages sprung from the original Aryan tongue are mutually unintelligible. There are certain differences in words arising from changes to which the sounds of a language are liable, and from different names given to the same thing. The Blackfeet, Bloods, and Piegans speaking the same language, when separated gave different names to the same things introduced by the white settlers. The Cree dialects reveal phonetic changes by the introduction of letters expressive of sounds which run through the whole language. The Eastern Dénés have lost quite a number of inflections still existing in the verbs of Carrier, a dialect of the Déné. The Déné languages belonging to the Athapascan stock have changed considerably. A. G. Morice says: "Time, or some other cause, has greatly reduced in the Chippewayan, Hare and Loucheux idioms, the number of the modificative forms of the objective, locomotive, and instrumentative verbs. The ordinal adjectives, which still exist in Carrier, have equally disappeared with the tribes' migrations eastward. It is also worthy of remark that the Chilxohtin—a Western dialect—which has many terminological affinities with the Hare (Eastern) dialect, has similarly lost those terms." The organs of speech change so that there arises an inability to utter certain sounds, as we find the Blackfoot tongue has no sound of the letters b, d, l, r.

The physical characteristics of races change, while language is influenced very slightly by climate, food and labour. The flora and fauna of the territory inhabited, and the tribal customs introduce new words, yet affect little the internal structure. Political influences arrest language, so that wherever we find a mixed language, as the Blackfoot, there has invariably been a mixture of blood. Language is not merely the conventional instrument of thought, but it is to a great extent its creator, and the mould in which it is cast. The mould may be broken and races adopt the language of a conquering race, but there is no instance in which there is a complete transformation, so as to pass into a different type. Kinship in speech develops national unity, and exercises a strong influence on politics, as seen in the change of attitude of the British towards the people of Hindostan upon the discovery of Sanskrit. Civilization again begets an influence diffusing some forms of speech, and destroying others. Mythology likewise changes the modes of expres-

sion, as already shown. Christianity lays hold of floating terms and by reducing the tongue to writing, and creating a literature makes them permanent, and introduces changes in the social customs and characters of the tribe or people.

The languages of the world are divided into three great classes : The monosyllabic, of which the Chinese is the best representative ; the agglutinative, represented by the peoples of Central Asia, the natives of Siberia, the Finns, the original inhabitants of Hindostan, and the American Indian race—all of these tribes and peoples living in the nomadic stage ; and the flexible, belonging to the historic nations, which stand in the forefront of civilization. The structure and capabilities of a language depend entirely on the natural capacity of the people with whom it originated, and not upon the degree of culture. Barbarous tongues do not belong to savage races, as can be shewn by the structure of those spoken by the American Indian tribes. Constant warfare among native tribes, scarcity of food, internal troubles, and a nomadic life, have separated portions of tribes, and in a generation or two there are formed dialects. The adoption of prisoners of war has wrought changes, and made a mixed language, as in the case of the Blackfoot. On the American continent the great multiplication of languages and dialects arises from the breaking up and scattering of tribes. The configuration of a country begets dialects, as seen in Italy, and the English and Scotch shires. The dialects of the Cree language show the internal changes arising from separation. The letter *l* is incorporated in the dialect spoken at Moose Factory, while in other dialects the letters *n*, *y*, *th* or *r* are substituted for it. As an illustration of the influence of this dialectic change take the personal pronoun ; Nela, kela, wela = I, thou, he, she, is the form in use at Moose Factory ; nena, kena, wena, at Albany, Severn, and York Factory ; neya, keya, weya, on the East Maine coast ; netha, ketha, wetha, at English River ; and nera, kera, wera, at Isle la Crosse. Although the Blackfeet, Bloods and Piegiens have been separated for a brief period on reservations, changes are taking place towards the formation of dialects. There is a continuity in language which nothing can destroy, and in the lowest languages there is seen order and wisdom. The main distinction between languages is to be found in the inner mechanism or grammar.

Grammar is interesting in showing the modes by which the human mind proceeded at remote periods, and by different races, in working out the great problem of articulate speech. Modifications are introduced for the purpose of conveying more clearly and briefly the ideas, and

these changes in structure are found in gender, plural, declensions, moods, and tenses of the verb and syntax. There does not exist a tribe without some kind of grammar, laws of structure, sometimes crude, yet sufficient to reveal regularity, beauty and strength. The most savage tribes without any literature possess languages of consistent grammatical structure sufficient for all the uses of effective native oratory. No matter how low in the scale of humanity a tribe has been found, it still possesses a complete and thoroughly organized language. Languages are not the result of mere chance, but are regulated by laws. Some of our native Canadian tribes possess in their dialects vehicles for thought more expressive and richer than some of the tongues of civilized peoples. The Déné language has no single term for "to be broken," but in lieu of the single Aryan term, this American tongue has no less than one hundred particularising substitutes, not one of which could be indifferently used for the other. These are expressive of the object employed to operate the breakage, the manner in which the object was affected, and the form of the object. These more than one hundred distinct verbs can be multiplied four or five times, according as the iterative, imitative, terminative, and other forms are used, whereby the signification is changed. The Sahaptin language spoken by the Nez Percé Indians, according to Hale, surpasses the Aryan and Semitic tongues in some of its forms. Its case-distinctions are much more profoundly reasoned and accurately classified than the Aryan, the verb surpasses both the Aryan and Semitic in the variety of its forms, and the precision and nicety of its distinctions, its tenses are as completely inflectional as Sanskrit, Greek, or German, and it possesses great power of agglutination. The Cree language is a beautiful and symmetrical tongue, possessing many forms of expression not found in those spoken by civilized nations. The paradigms of the verb cover more than two hundred and forty closely printed folio pages. The Blackfoot tongue is a guttural form of speech, symmetrical and euphonious, very expressive and abundant in grammatical forms. What has been said concerning these languages can be repeated for almost any dialect spoken by an American Indian tribe. Of the Mohawk tongue Max Müller says: "To my mind, the structure of such a language as the Mohawk is quite sufficient evidence that those who worked out such a work of art were powerful reasoners and accurate classifiers," and of the Algonkin speech, Professor Whitney remarks: "There are infinite possibilities and expressiveness in such a structure; and it would only need that some native American Greek race should arise to fill it full of thought and fancy, and to put it to the uses of a noble literature, and it would be rightly admired as rich and flexible, perhaps beyond anything else that

the world knew." Indeed there is no shade of idea in respect to time, place, and manner of action which the verbs of these languages cannot express.

The existence of the laws of language by which order, beauty, strength and expressiveness are seen in the internal structure of every form of speech, the unknown operation of some of these laws, and the mysteries of speech and language which lie hidden from the human mind, manifest supreme intelligence. The discoveries made in this realm of knowledge corroborate the previous evidences of Divine wisdom. The languages of the world are another revelation of Him who made all things for Himself, and in them we find another argument for the existence of a wise, beneficent and loving God

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